

CHAPTER II: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FAMILIES

In this chapter, we present a profile of the 221 families who completed both rounds of telephone interviews for the study. The data are derived from administrative records and the surveys.

A. BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS

Exhibit II-1: Number of Parents in the Case, shows that almost all of the cases (98.6 percent) were one-parent cases. As noted in *Exhibit II-2: Gender of Casehead*, most of the cases (96.8 percent) were headed by females. *Exhibit II-3: Ethnicity of Respondents* indicates that about 63.8 percent of the 221 families were headed by blacks and 32.1 percent by whites.

As noted in *Exhibit II-4: Age of Casehead in December 1999*, a relatively large percentage (36.7 percent) of the 221 cases had caseheads who were over 40 years old. The median age of respondents was 38, compared to a median age of 27 for the entire Work First caseload. The age distribution of the respondents is a reflection of the fact that, when Work First was initially introduced, families who had school-age children were exempted from the 24-month time limits and the work participation requirements. In addition, the program was initially targeted to persons who had been active in the former JOBS program, so that most of the clients who were initially placed on time limits tended to be those who had been on welfare for some period of time. As noted in Chapter II of the report, the age distribution of the sample had implications for such matters as the use of subsidized child care.

As noted in *Exhibit II-5: Education Level of Respondents*, the respondents had relatively high levels of education. Overall, 75 percent of the respondents had completed 12 years of education or more. About 57 percent of the respondents had some post-secondary education or training beyond high school, while 18.4 percent had only a high school diploma or equivalent. One quarter (25 percent) had not completed high school diploma or a GED. No information was available in the administrative records for 9 of the respondents. The high level of education among the sample is a reflection of the fact that, as noted above, Work First was initially targeted in many counties to persons who had been active in the JOBS program.

Exhibit II-1 NUMBER OF PARENTS IN THE CASE

TYPE OF CASE	NUMBER	PERCENT
One-Parent Case	219	99.1%
Two-Parent Case	2	0.9%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

Exhibit II-2
GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENT
Female	214	96.8%
Male	7	3.2%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

Exhibit II-3
ETHNICITY OF THE RESPONDENTS

ETHNICITY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Black	141	63.8%
White	71	32.1%
Native American	4	1.8%
Other	5	2.4%
Total	221	100.0%

Exhibit II-4
AGE OF RESPONDENTS AT THE SECOND INTERVIEW

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
22 to 25	4	1.8%
26 to 30	20	9.0%
31 to 35	51	23.1%
36 to 40	65	29.4%
Over 40	81	36.7%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

Exhibit II-5
EDUCATION LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

EDUCATION LEVEL	NUMBER	PERCENT
Did Not Complete High School or GED	53	25.0%
Completed High School or GED Only	39	18.4%
Some Post-secondary Education or Training	120	56.6%
TOTAL	212	100.0%

B. URBAN/RURAL RESIDENCE

The families were mostly from rural areas or from counties with small to medium-size towns. Relatively few were from counties with large cities. The North Carolina Association of County Social Services Directors has developed a classification scheme for the 100 counties in North Carolina. Counties are assigned to one of three categories — Rural, Urban, or Metropolitan — that form a continuum according to the size of the major cities in each county and the complexity of the operations of each county’s Department of Social Services. The Metropolitan counties include the state’s largest cities, such as Asheville, Fayetteville, Durham, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Charlotte, Wilmington, and Raleigh. The “urban” counties contain the state’s smaller municipalities.

Exhibit II-6: Urban/Rural Residence of the Respondents shows that about half of the 221 families lived in “urban” counties, and that almost a third (31.7 percent) lived in rural counties. Less than one fifth lived in “metropolitan” counties containing large cities.

Exhibit II-6 URBAN/RURAL RESIDENCE OF RESPONDENTS

TYPE OF COUNTY	NUMBER	PERCENT
Rural	70	31.7%
Urban	110	49.8%
“Metropolitan” (Large Cities)	41	18.6%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

C. TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD

The average size of households decreased between the first and second surveys. In the first survey, household size ranged from 1 to 10 persons, compared with a range of 1 to 7 persons in the second survey. The average number of people per household decreased from 3.35 to 3.15.

D. NUMBER AND AGES OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Survey respondents were asked how many children (under the age of 18) were living in the home. Most families did not have large numbers of children. As noted in *Exhibit II-7: Number of Children Living in the Home*, 81.8 percent of the families had two children or fewer at the time of the Round 2 surveys, with 11 respondents (5.0 percent) having no children in the home. In addition, the number of children in the home decreased from 1.89 to 1.65 between the first and second surveys. The percent of homes with one or no children increased from 46.1 percent to 52.7 percent, and the percent of homes with 3 or more children decreased from 23.3

percent to 18.2 percent. In the first survey, the largest number of children in one family was 7, compared to only 5 in the second survey.

Exhibit II-8 presents data on the age of their youngest child. At the time of the second survey, the average age of the youngest child was 10.71 years. In 92.8 percent of families, the youngest child was aged 5 or older. The fact that most of the families did not have young children is a result of the targeting of the Work First program to families without pre-school children when the program was implemented in 1996.

Exhibit II-7 NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN THE HOME

NUMBER OF CHILDREN	ROUND 1	ROUND 2
None	0.0%	5.0%
One	46.1%	47.7%
Two	30.6%	29.1%
Three	16.9%	14.5%
Four or more	6.4%	3.7%
Total	100.0% Average Number of Children 1.89	100.0% Average Number of Children 1.65

Exhibit II-8 AGE OF THE YOUNGEST CHILD, ROUND 2 SURVEYS

AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD	PERCENT
Less than a year	2.4%
1 to 2 years	2.4%
3 to 4 years	2.4%
5 to 9 years	29.0%
10 to 14 years	43.8%
15 years and over	20.0%
Total	100.0% Average age 10.71

E. NUMBER AND RELATIONSHIP OF OTHER ADULTS LIVING IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Overall, 38.5 percent of the families had other adults in the household. About 29 percent of families had one other adult (usually not the other parent) and 9.5 percent had 2 or more other adults living in the household. As noted in Exhibit II-9, the most common relationship to the respondent was parent or grandparent, followed by adult child, partner, sibling, other relative, and unrelated adult.

Exhibit II-9
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS LIVING WITH
OTHER ADULTS, ROUND 2 SURVEYS

RELATIONSHIP	PERCENT
Living with parent/grandparent	19.5%
Living with adult child	15.4%
Living with spouse/partner	7.7%
Living with sibling	5.0%
Living with other relative	2.3%
Living with other unrelated adult	0.9%
Overall Percent Living with Other Adult	38.5%

F. PRIOR TIME ON CASH ASSISTANCE AND BENEFIT LEVELS

In general, the respondents had been on cash assistance for long periods of time in North Carolina, based on data from administrative records. Most of the 221 families (91.9 percent) had been receiving cash assistance in January 1995 (three and a half years before they reached the time limits in July 1998). In contrast, only 44.7 percent of the entire Work First caseload in August 1998 had been receiving welfare in January 1995. Based on the surveys, 54.3 percent of the 221 respondents first received cash payments from North Carolina prior to 1990 (at least eight years prior to reaching time limits).

As indicated in *Exhibit II-10: Prior Time on Cash Assistance*, a large percentage (82.8 percent) of the 221 families had received cash assistance every month between January of 1995 and July of 1998. The remaining 17.2 percent of families had received cash assistance for between 27 and 39 months during the 43-month period. Overall, 92 percent of the 221 families had received cash assistance for at least 40 of the 43 months between January of 1995 and July of 1998. This compares to only 35.5 percent for the entire Work First caseload in July 1998.

Exhibit II-10

PRIOR TIME ON CASH ASSISTANCE

MONTHS RECEIVING WELFARE BETWEEN JANUARY 1995 AND JULY 1998	NUMBER	PERCENT
34 or less	11	5.0%
35 to 38	4	1.8%
39 to 42	23	10.4%
43 (maximum possible)	183	82.8%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

As part of the second round of surveys, respondents were asked when the first began receiving cash assistance in North Carolina. The results are shown in Exhibit II-10. As indicated, 54.2 percent first began receiving welfare before 1990. A total of 89.5 percent had begun receiving cash assistance before 1995.

Exhibit II-11 YEAR WHEN RESPONDENTS FIRST RECEIVED CASH ASSISTANCE IN NORTH CAROLINA

YEAR	NUMBER	PERCENT
Before 1980	14	6.3%
1980-1984	35	15.8%
1985-1989	71	32.1%
1990-1994	78	35.3%
1995	23	10.4%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

Based on the administrative data, the 221 families received a wide range of cash payment levels. The payment amount for each family is determined by a formula that takes into account family size, earnings in the prior month, and other factors. The monthly cash payments that families received during their time on Work First ranged from \$115 to \$552.

As noted in *Exhibit II-12: Highest Monthly Cash Payment Received by Survey Respondents*, about 49.3 percent of the families received cash assistance payments of \$261 or less. Only a small proportion of families (6.3 percent) received more than \$297. The average cash assistance payment for the families was \$264, compared to an average of \$236 for the Work First caseload as a whole. The median payment was \$272.

Exhibit II-12 HIGHEST MONTHLY CASH PAYMENT

RECEIVED WHILE ON WORK FIRST

HIGHEST MONTHLY CASH PAYMENT	NUMBER	PERCENT
\$236 and under	102	46.2%
\$237 to \$272	65	29.4%
\$273 to \$297	40	18.1%
\$298 to \$324	8	3.6%
Over \$324	6	2.7%
TOTAL	221	100.0%

G. NON-RESPONSE BIAS

Little evidence of non-response bias was identified in Round 1 of the surveys, based on an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the overall sample.¹ Since 90 percent of those surveyed in the first round were also surveyed in the second round, non-response bias was not introduced in Round Two.

H. DISCUSSION

The families who were the first to reach the Work First time limits in August 1998 had an unusual combination of characteristics. Some of these characteristics – such as long-term welfare receipt with little interruption in welfare spells -- are normally associated with “hard-to-serve” segments of the welfare population. In contrast, other characteristics – such as the relatively large percentage who had completed high school and received post-secondary education – are more typical of welfare recipients who are easier to place in jobs. In addition, the relative absence of young children among the families means that one of the most important barriers to leaving welfare – access to convenient and affordable child care – was not a major issue for most of the families in the sample.

This unusual combination of characteristics among the survey sample was the result of the unique set of circumstances that made them the first to reach the Work First time limits in August 1998. To reach the time limits in this month, they had to have been on assistance continuously for the whole 24 months since the initial implementation of Work First in 1996. Therefore, they tended to be families who were on welfare for long periods of time. On the other hand, because they were targeted for inclusion in Work First as soon as the program was implemented, they typically had been participating in training and education activities under the JOBS program. They also had to be free of major health-related problems or other barriers that would have exempted them from the Work First time limits.

¹ Status of Families Leaving Work First After Reaching the 24-Month Time Limit, MAXIMUS. May 1999, Chapter II.

In summary, the families had certain characteristics (such as long-term welfare dependency) that might have made them difficult to employ, but they were not the most hard-to-serve component of the welfare caseload. This situation must be considered when interpreting the data on post-welfare outcomes among the sample.